



The Marian Library Newsletter

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Christmas around the World:

Crèches . . . Cribs . . . Krippen . . . Nacimientos . . . Presepi . . .

Re-creating the scene of Christ's birth is one of the most tender and enduring Christmas traditions. Making representations of the Nativity is a universally popular art form which flourished in Europe since the sixteenth century. In every language, it is known for its focal point, the crib of the Infant Jesus—*crèche* in France, *Krippe* in Germany, *presepio* in Italy, *Belem* in Portugal, *presebre* in Spain, and *nacimiento* in Latin America.

The desire to venerate the spot where Christ was born and to make the event visible are deeply rooted in Christian tradition. St. Helena, the mother of Constantine, was responsible for the Basilica of the Nativity, built over the cavern where, according to available sources, Christ was born. Wood from the crib of Bethlehem was venerated in St. Mary Major in Rome, the oldest church and principal church dedicated to the Virgin Mary, sometimes known as St. Mary at the Crib.

From the 6th to the 15th century, the nativity story was told with living persons in the cathedrals and churches. In England, the manger, watched over by the Virgin Mary, was placed behind the altar where choirboys dressed as angels sang carols. In Germany, the servers rocked the cradle to comfort the Baby Jesus ("cradle rocking" is alluded to in some Christmas carols and lullabies). These church pageants evolved into the mystery plays, elaborate productions which included all the characters of the Gospel account and contemporary additions. Stages were

mounted on wagons and pulled through the town, each wagon depicting a different scene. These liturgical dramas continue to be mirrored in nativity sets.

The poetic and compassionate St. Francis of Assisi played a decisive role in the evolution of the Christmas crib. According to his biographer, Francis was saddened that the "Infant Jesus had been forgotten in the hearts of many." In the Italian village of Greccio in 1223, he wished to create a "second Bethlehem" so all could see the poverty in which Christ was born. For the Christmas Eve Mass, he placed an ox, an ass, and some sheep in a stable-like setting. The altar was placed over a sleeping infant. The people were deeply moved at this "new custom" and experienced a "new joy." In describing the scene, St. Bonaventure wrote, "Greccio was transformed into a second Bethlehem and that wonderful night seemed like the fullest day to both man and beast for the joy they felt at the renewing of the mystery."

Christmas pageants and cribs were fostered by the Franciscans, Capuchins, and Jesuits, and they became part of their educational and missionary activity. Jesuit missionaries in Canada wrote that they had great success with Christmas plays with North American Indians. Franciscans brought to Mexico *Las Posadas* and *Los Pastores*, direct descendants of the mystery plays. The story of *Las Posadas* ("the inns") is that of Mary and Joseph searching for a place to spend the night. *Los Pastores* recounts how the



Peru — Terra Cotta



Benedictines of Jouarre (France) — Ceramic

All crèches from the Marian Library Collection.



Appalachia — Husks and Bark

shepherds responded to the angels' announcement.

Before the Reformation, crib building was deeply rooted in the German lands of Bavaria and the Tyrol. Master craftsmen carved wood figures noted for their religious realism and reverent simplicity. Many of these works can now be seen in diocesan museums in Germany. Some were even "mechanized," allowing the figures to pass in procession in front of the Infant Jesus to receive his blessing, while strains from music boxes filled the air.

One of the few groups stemming from the Reformation which retained the crib were the Moravians. On Christmas Eve, 1741, Moravian missionaries founded the city of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and set up their Christmas decorations (known as *putz*) which contained the nativity set along with a forest, mountains, lakes and waterfalls. In pre-Reformation England, the mince pie, which was the center of the Christmas meal, was made in the oblong shape of a manger with an indentation to hold a replica of an infant. The English Puritans, who outlawed Christmas, declared particular war on the mince pie as "idolatrie in crust." After the Restoration, the mince pie returned in circular form and lost the symbolism of the crib.

Sun-drenched Naples witnessed the golden age of crib building in the 1700s. Churches and wealthy patrons commissioned artists to create sets of hundreds of polychromatic figures with elaborately structured backgrounds. When Don Carlos of Bourbon became King of Naples in 1734, crèche-making was a national preoccupation. His own royal crèche was said to number some 5,950 characters. Ladies of the court took the greatest care with the trimmings and accessories. Silks, brocades, ribbons and laces were woven in miniature designs.

In *The Christmas Presepio in Italy*, Nesta de Robeck paints a lively picture of Christmas in Naples. "Advent was spent in a frenzy of preparation and Christmas became a social event with people rushing from house to house, church to church, visiting, admiring, criticising each other's "Bethlehem." Often the *presepio* occupied the whole floor of a house, sometimes even the whole house, different scenes being represented in different rooms and concerts of appropriate Nativity music held in honor of any distinguished guest."

A noted Neapolitan crèche scene now in the United States is the "The Adoration of the Angels," annually exhibited during the Christmas season at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. It was the gift in 1965 of



Montréal — Glazed Ceramic

Loretta Hines Howard (who for a time lived in Dayton, Ohio). When she acquired the set, which included thirty exquisitely wrought angels of exceptional beauty, it lacked its architectural background. Mrs. Howard combined the Neapolitan nativity with the northern European Christmas tree by having the angels swirled up the tree to the top star. Each year this display of carved figures, with a towering tree, encircling angels, glowing lights, and joyous music delights thousands of visitors.

In retelling the story of Christ's birth, the Christian imagination supplies many details to the Gospel account. The magi, who were royalty, come to the crib accompanied with an entourage of attendants. The shepherds, to whom the angels sang the first *Gloria*, come with flutes and tambourines. Since the birth of Christ was not considered an event from the distant past, the well known figures of the parish and town—the butcher, baker, blacksmith, and beggar—are represented in the crowd around the crib. Dogs and chickens mix with the oxen and sheep.

Interest in nativity sets continues on different levels and in different ways. Collectors vie to acquire centuries-old masterpieces from art dealers. Churches and families add to and repair crib sets which have been passed down from generation to generation. Nativity scenes from Africa, Asia, and Latin America take their place along side those from Europe. Contemporary creations portray Joseph and Mary as a homeless family huddled together on a city grate which provides warmth.

Sets have been created in different styles and methods of construction. Beside the exquisite wood carvings of Bavaria and the lavish creations of the Neapolitan Baroque, there are simpler styles descended from ancient crafts and traditions; new styles of folk and primitive art appear. The use of humble materials—paper, cork, wood, straw—and precious ones—silver, coral, pearl—indicates that all creation has been touched by God's coming.

Nativity scenes from different parts of the world show how the unique event of Christ's birth in Bethlehem enters into and becomes part of the life story of families and peoples.

A Meditation before the Christmas Crib

Three symbols represent the Christmas season: the Christmas tree, Santa Claus, and the Christmas crib. The green of the Christmas tree is a symbol of nature's vitality and abundance. Santa Claus, whose origins are associated with the practice of gift giving, may have become irretrievably commercial. Yet, the Christmas tree and Santa Claus indicate something about the meaning of Christmas—the hunger for eternal life and the joy of giving freely.

The Christmas crib is, however, the most direct symbol of the season. The Christmas crib is both message and story. With the crib, the long period of waiting and hoping has past, and the course of the history of the human family has been changed.

Representations of the biblical events connected with Christ's birth are first found in the fresco paintings of the catacombs and the decorative symbols at burial places. The oldest known wall painting, from the first half of the 3rd century, shows Mary and the child Jesus, with a figure at their side, probably the prophet Balaam, pointing to a star. The star symbolizes Christ descended from Jacob. Balaam points to Christ as the star "though not now. . . though not near."

Other early representations see the Christmas mystery as a manifestation and proclamation to the whole world. On a 4th-century sarcophagus in the Vatican Museum, the magi with their gifts approach the mother who holds the child on her knee. The kings' adoration points not to the past, as did Balaam's, but to the future. The Christ Child will draw all people. His coming opens a new stage of sacred history: God's grace, in human form, becomes manifest to all the world.

The Emperor Constantine is said to have commissioned a fresco of the Nativity scene for the walls of Bethlehem's

Basilica of the Nativity. It included a pensive Joseph, angels and shepherds, ox and ass. These frescoes apparently served as examples for later reproductions, among them the well-known ampula of Monza from the sixth century and the Sinai icon of the same period.

The East and West have two contrasting ways of portraying the birth of Jesus. In the Byzantine and Slavic traditions, the birth of Christ is presented as an event for our contemplation, directing us to the mystery of God's incomprehensible love for humanity. Since the never-changing God is ever on the way to us, the representations of this mystery show little change. The Eastern icons of the Christmas event are all similar. The most famous are from the 11th century in the monastery of Daphni (Athens), from the 14th-century church of the redeemer in Chora (Korie Djami), and the 15th-century Christmas icon attributed to Roublev. All point to God's love coming to earth in the person of Christ. Heaven and earth celebrate the wedding of the human and the divine. A ray of light binds together the natural and the supernatural. The incarnation and redemption, represented by crib and cross, come together in the form of a manger with crossed beams.

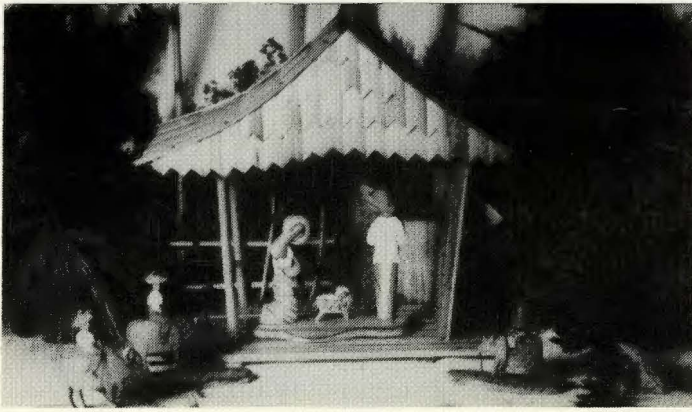
The Western tradition has a more varied and colorful way of depicting Christmas: the focus shifts from the divine origins to the human embodiment. The West's representations of Christmas span the gamut of religious sensibilities and artistic styles. From the early Catalan Nativity set of Solsona, Spain (12th century), to the rotating forms of mother and child in the abstract art of Albert Gleizes (1881-1953), the West has responded to the manifestation of God's mystery in a rich variety of ways. Even the mystical Christmas meditation of



Native American



Tanzania — Ebony



Philippines — Bamboo



Bangladesh — Black Clay

Botticelli, with its light-footed angels dancing in billows of clouds, is firmly rooted in the physical world.

Contemporary writers speak of a “Christology from below,” which begins with the human Jesus and ascends to the divine, and a “Christology from above,” which begins with the divine person and proceeds to the human. This distinction is not new. It is rooted in the way Western and Eastern peoples and, to an extent, the Western and the Eastern Church, see themselves. In the West, the religious question begins with the human person; in the East, the search begins with the meaning of God. However, at Christmas, in both East and West, the attention of all is fixed on the Infant Christ, who by bringing together heaven and earth unites within himself all peoples.

John Paul II has stated that the Church must breathe with both its lungs—the East and the West. The fullness of the mystery of the Incarnation is present only when the Church is conscious that God descends to humanity and that humanity is taken up to God. As the Father is truly God, so Jesus Christ is God: the fullness of the divinity is in the Son. His substance is not different from that of the Father. Yet, this declaration of the Council of Nicaea (325) required the fuller explanation. The teaching of St. Athanasius was completed by St. Cyril at Ephesus (431). The Word of God did not suddenly seize and transform a fully grown human into the person of Jesus Christ. No, God became man through the natural processes of conception, pregnancy, and birth. Divinity united itself to human nature in a true but mysterious way. This unity cannot be sundered: it is manifest where the invisible divinity and the visible humanity are joined in the living person of Jesus Christ.

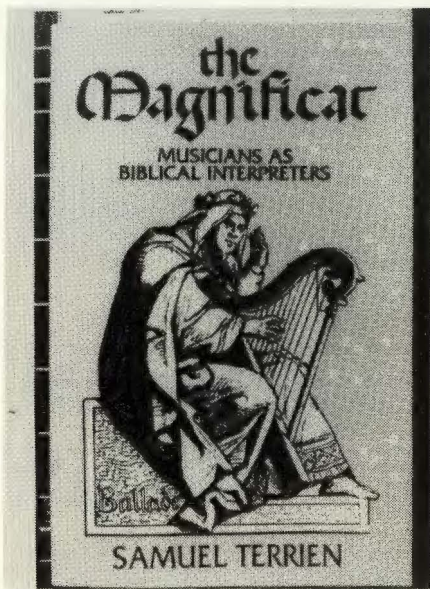
Assembling the crib is the crowning point of Advent, that season of quiet expectation, shrouded in the dark colors of violet and blue. But, with the appearance of the crib, everything suddenly changes. The dark becomes bright and filled with the expectancy of life. The crib is gift to those who have persevered through the period of waiting.

The crib can also be seen as an expression of God's continuing presence among us become ever more complete. The varied figures of sacred history are present in the nativity scene and help us to understand God's presence unfolding. In a way, assembling the crib points to the initiative of God. Advent signifies primarily not a time of waiting but one of coming. The Advent season presents to us the long history through which God comes to us, makes his dwelling with us, and is accepted by us.

The God of Jesus Christ is one of irrepressible love and union. In the Trinity, there is an uninterrupted cycle of love symbolized in the union without confusion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Without diminution or loss of identity, God-among-us—Creator, Redeemer, and Spirit—continues in an outpouring of love. This God is the beginning of the mystery of Christmas. He has left the throne of glory to become a willing prisoner of place and time. His entrance into our history forms the decisive chapter in his ongoing story of love.

— *Johann Roten, S.M.* (Adapted from *Gottes Kommen in der Zeit: Ein Krippenbau*, 1994, and translated by Sr. Jean Frisk.)

Books



The Magnificat: Musicians as Biblical Interpreters.

Samuel Terrien. New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995. \$9.95. ISBN 0-8091-3485-3.

Mary's Canticle, the Magnificat, is a cherished part of the daily prayer of all the churches. In addition to the various ecclesiastical chants, classical composers—from Dufay, through Gabrieli, Monteverdi, Vivaldi, Tellemann, to Vaughan Williams, Tippett and Penderecki—have set the text of the Magnificat to music. The purpose of this unique book of Scriptural commentary and musical analysis is to suggest that sometimes composers in their musical settings of the Magnificat have captured and “expounded more forcefully the meaning of the text than have scholars and theologians.”

For Samuel Terrien, longtime professor of Hebrew and cognate languages at Union Theological Seminary, the Magnificat was originally written in Hebrew. This becomes evident, he points out, when the present Greek text is translated back into Hebrew: several striking features common to Hebrew poetry appear. Fortunately, Professor Terrien provides a useful “Table of Parallelism and Assonances of Hebrew Words” of the Magnificat. The verses from the Gospel of Luke translated into

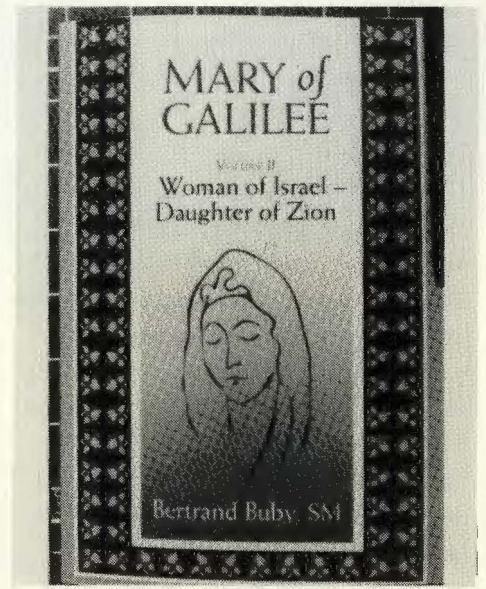
Hebrew are as a “masterpiece of Hebrew poetry” with a structure similar to many psalms: a poem of four strophes centered around a core affirmation—Luke 1,51.

A commentary on each of the four strophes is provided. Because of the author's deep familiarity with the Hebrew poetry of the psalms, strikingly original interpretations are offered. For example, “All generations shall call me blessed,” may sound like static affirmation. However, the underlying substratum for the word “blessed” refers to a happiness which is “on-going, growing, and which includes others.” It is a “summons to the voyage of life from a leader.” Mary's declaration of happiness is a challenge to the Church to “prolong, continue, broaden, and incarnate Mary's expectation.” Another example: God's mercy (v. 50) on those who fear him denotes his longing to be with humanity; the fear of humanity is that it cannot adequately respond to the selfless compassion of God.

The climax is the core-verse (v.51): “He has shown strength in his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.” This verse relates the incarnation to justice, and points to the disintegration which must come to those who trust in themselves and their riches.

After the commentary on each strophe, there is an analysis of a section of the Magnificat from one of the classical composers, showing how the musical passage conveys in striking way a meaning of the text difficult to convey with words alone—solidarity, incompleteness, and expectation.

Those who wish soothing platitudes and gentle consolation are advised to avoid this book. On the other hand, those who read the commentary and listen to the suggested musical passages will find that the Magnificat will never be quite the same.



Mary of Galilee.

Vol. II: Woman of Israel—Daughter of Zion A Biblical, Liturgical, and Catechetical Celebration of the Mother of Jesus. Bertrand Buby, S.M. New York: Alba House, 1995. \$17.95. ISBN 0-8189-0697-9.

This is the second part of Fr. Bert Buby's trilogy on the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Scriptures. The first work dealt with Mary in the New Testament, the second with Mary in the Hebrew Scriptures, and the third part will deal with Mary in the Apocrypha and Apostolic Writers.

Because some may be surprised to learn that there are any references to Mary in the Hebrew Scripture, the introduction provides valuable principles for interpreting the Scriptures. The Catholic Church regards the Scriptures as a living text with a specific historical reference but with new meanings for successive generations of believers. The *Lectionary of the Mass* (1981) states that God's word is enriched with new meaning and power at each liturgy.

The Hebrew Scriptures provide symbols, themes, and events, which, when read in the light of Christ's death and resurrection, point to the person and role of the Virgin Mary. Underlying this method of interpretation is the principle that both the Hebrew

Books, Continued on next page

Books, Continued from previous page

Scriptures and the New Testament have one ultimate author and attain their fullest meaning when read in the light of Christ's paschal mystery: "They comprise one book which is inspired and revealed by a living, loving and personal God."

Mary was a true "woman of Israel" and we understand her better through the Jewish context in which she lived. There were Scriptural verses which she pondered and prayed, and customs which every Jewish mother and wife followed. Within the Catholic tradition, she was seen as the daughter of Zion, the representative of her people, and the woman of faith. The Church's liturgy has seen her exemplified and prefigured in the holy women of the Hebrew Scriptures—Rachel, Rebecca, Miriam, Judith, Esther, and Ruth.

The work deals with the readings from the Hebrew Scriptures used in the *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, and the Marian themes found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The appendices contain lists from the Hebrew Scriptures and Marian references in Catholic catechisms.

Similar to the approach used in the first volume, the author always has an eye on the pastoral implications of a text. The work opens new ways of appreciating the Scriptures; it will be useful to homilists and teachers who want a succinct and readily available introduction or review of a Scriptural verse related to the Virgin Mary.

The International Marian Research Institute

On May 22, 1995, the Rev. Peter M. J. Stravinskias presented and defended his doctoral dissertation on "The Place of Mary in the Proselytizing Efforts of Fundamentalists and the Catholic Response." The director of the study was Fr. Johann G. Roten, S.M. The readers were Frs. Eamon R. Carroll, O.Carm., Theodore A. Koehler, S.M., and Thomas A. Thompson, S.M.

On May 27, 1995, Bro. Donald A. Boccardi, S.M., explained and defended his doctoral dissertation, "The Reception of Official and Scholarly Dialogues on Mary at the Grassroots Level of Clergy and Laity in Various Christian Traditions." The director of the study was Fr. Johann G. Roten, S.M., and the readers were Frs. Eamon R. Carroll, O.Carm., Bertrand A. Buby, S.M., and Theodore Koehler, S.M.

Candidates who have recently joined the degree program are Sister Celia Chua, M.I.C., (Montreal); Sister Isabell Naumann (Schoenstatt Sisters, Australia); Frs. Javier Alson, S.M.C., and Antonio Larocca, S.M.C. (Congregation of Mary Coredeptrix, Venezuela), Msgr. Matthew Molnar and Mrs. Marie Louise Handal.

The Mariological Society of America. . .

The 1996 meeting of the Mariological Society of America will take place at Villanova University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, May 29-31, 1996. The topic of the meeting is "Marian Spirituality and the Interreligious Dialogue." Presentations on the meaning and scope of the interreligious dialogue, on the Virgin Mary in the Koran, in the Christian-Buddhist dialogue, and in the devotional Hindu writings are being planned. The program will be available in January, 1996.

Marian Studies, proceedings of the annual meeting of the Mariological Society of America, has been selected for inclusion in *Religious and Theological Abstracts*.

Marian Studies 45 contains articles on two sociological surveys related to the Virgin Mary. In the first, the findings and conclusion of a survey concerning the attitudes of young people toward the Blessed Virgin are tabulated and analysed. Over 3,000 high-school and college students participated in this study. The second survey reports on the teaching of Mariology in Catholic colleges and seminaries. Copies of *Marian Studies 45* are available, \$12.00 prepaid.

Hundreds of entries have been submitted to the Mariological Society's search for Marian hymns. The search is being conducted as a way of making known the need for hymns which can be used with the *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. The hymns will be judged by the following criteria: 1) awareness of the theological principles and inclusion of images found in the *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary*; 2) suitability of being used at a specific moment within the Eucharistic liturgy (e.g., Entrance Hymn, Communion, Recessional) or for a period of the liturgical year (Advent, Lent, Easter); 3) hymnic form (arranged in stanzas with the same metrical pattern).

The Council of the Pontifical Marian Academy (PAMI) has announced the theme for the 12th International Mariological Congress, Czestochowa (Poland), August 18-24, 1996: "Mary, the Mother of the Lord, in the Mystery of Salvation, Celebrated in the Holy Spirit, by the Churches of the East and West."



Tanzania — Ebony



Peru — Terra Cotta



Zaire — Ebony



Peru — Terra Cotta

Mary Page on the World Wide Web

The Mary Page of the University of Dayton was inaugurated on the commemoration of Mary's Birthday, September 8, 1995. It was featured with a color photo on the front page of the *Dayton Daily News* on September 7, 1995, and the story was carried in over 180 newspapers. In the first week, the page attracted 2,500 surfers. And, in less than two months, more than 9,000 visitors have made what the *Washington Post* called a "cyberpilgrimage" to the site.

One of the page's most popular features is the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about Mary. These questions are continuously updated, based on the inquiries and suggestions from viewers. Not surprisingly, the two most frequently asked questions about Mary are "Why do Catholics pray to Mary?" and "What do Catholics believe about the virginity of Mary?"

The Mary Page can be found at <http://www.udayton.edu/mary> or by following the "teaching, research and support areas" link from the UD home page, found at <http://www.udayton.edu>

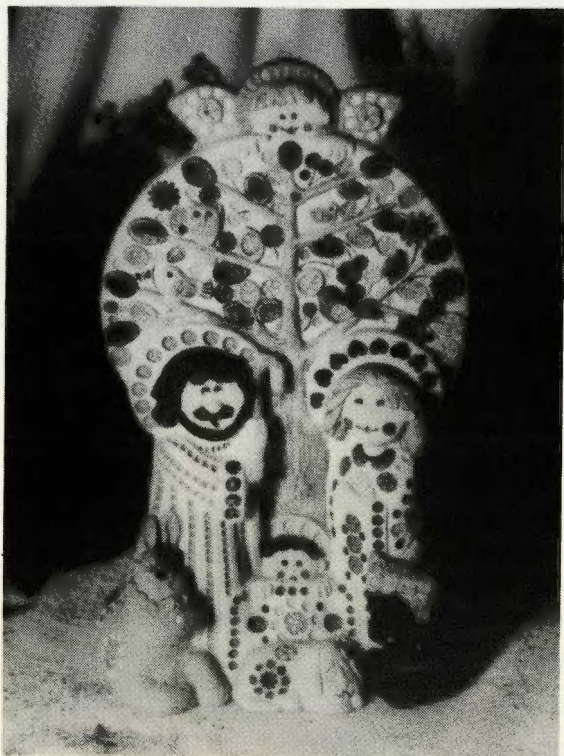
Accessing the Marian Library Book Collection

Major portions of the Marian Library's book catalog are contained in the University of Dayton's Innopac (online catalog). To access it, a personal computer with communications software, a modem and telephone are necessary. Set your communications software on your personal computer to include the following communication parameters, duplex: full; parity: none; character format: 8 data bits and 1 stop bit; baud rate: 2400, 9600, 14.4; terminal type: vt100; telephone number: 229-4652. At the VAX \$ prompt, type: telnet flyers.udayton.edu (or) telnet 131.238.49.14. For more information, contact MaryAnn Walker, Automation and Library Systems, University of Dayton; telephone 513/229-4215 email: maryann@data.lib.udayton.edu.

*O Mary,
bright dawn of the new world,
Mother of the living,
to you do we entrust the cause of life:
Look down, O Mother,
upon the vast numbers
of babies not allowed to be born,
of the poor whose lives are made difficult,
of men and women who are
victims of brutal violence,
of the elderly and the sick killed
by indifference or out of misguided
mercy.*

*Grant that all who believe in your Son
may proclaim the Gospel of life
with honesty and love
to the people of our time.
Obtain for them the grace
to accept that Gospel
as a gift ever new,
the joy of celebrating it with gratitude
throughout their lives
and the courage to bear witness to it
resolutely, in order to build,
together with all people of good will,
the civilization of truth and love,
to the praise and glory of God,
the Creator and lover of life.
Amen.*

—Pope John Paul II,
"The Gospel of Life,"
March 25, 1995



Andalusia (Spain)

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